

# ***Revolutionary Perspectives***

# **2**

Quarterly Magazine of the Communist Workers Organisation

## **Is The Communist Manifesto Relevant Today?**

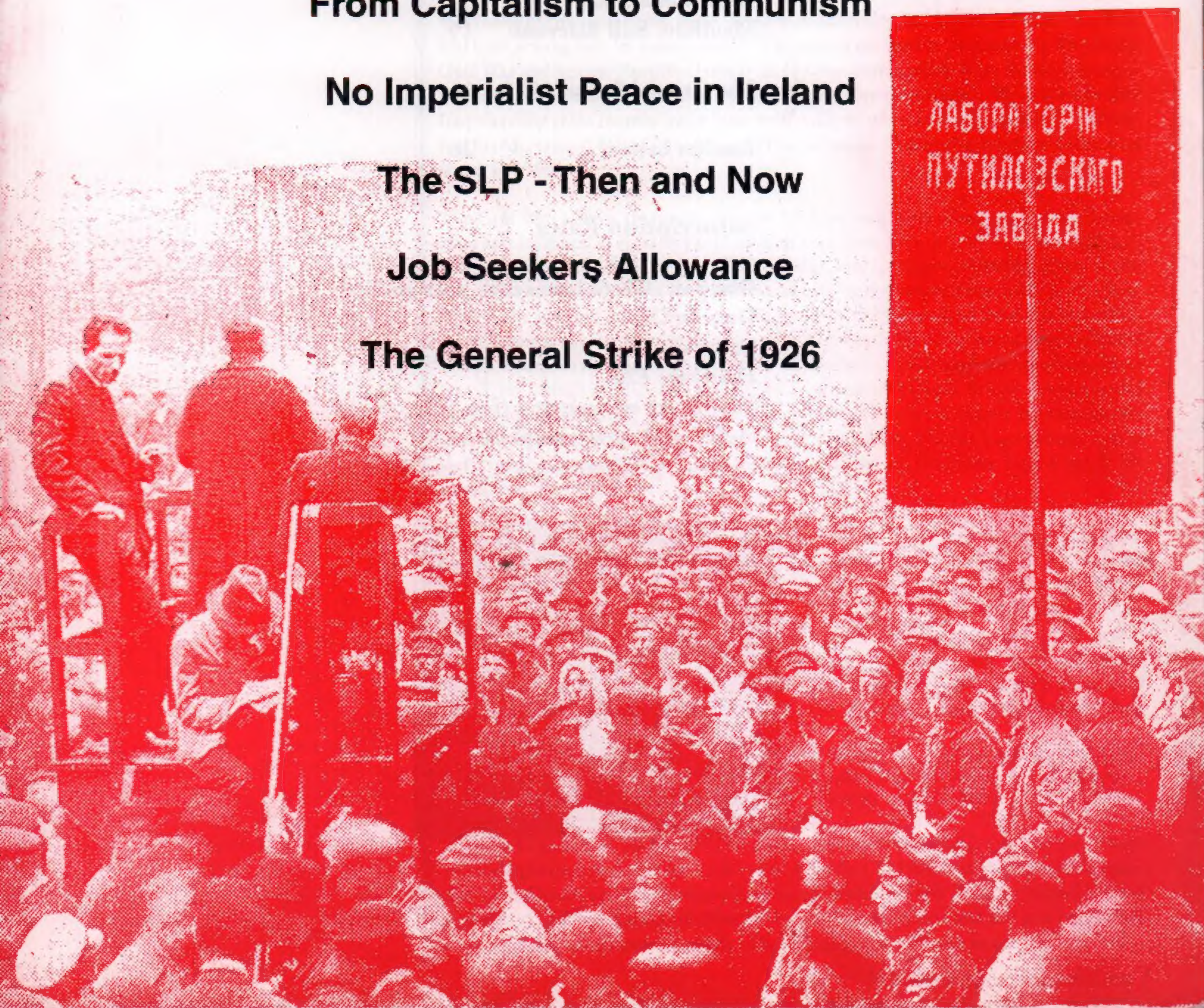
**From Capitalism to Communism**

**No Imperialist Peace in Ireland**

**The SLP - Then and Now**

**Job Seekers Allowance**

**The General Strike of 1926**





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## The Real Issue about Arms for Iraq

The Scott Report has turned out to be a disappointment to all those who thought that it would reveal anything important about Government lies. But what did they really expect? Did they seriously think that the state would appoint an inquiry that actually told the truth? Sir Richard Scott may like cycling but his main task was to peddle the idea that, despite the odd bad character, British democracy is "the best you can get" (Scott's main previous claim to upper class solidarity was his injunction preventing South Wales miners shouting at scabs in 1984-5!).

Scott might have revealed how the British state was so ruthless that it was even prepared to send its own spies to jail to cover up its dirty tricks in the arms trade but the whole debate has been a deliberate smokescreen. Whilst we have had our attention directed to what the Government did or did not say in Parliament the economic crisis is daily devastating the lives of more and more workers. The issue of which bourgeois political party is more corrupt than the other ignores the far bigger problem that we are living in one of the longest economic crises in the history of world capitalism. Even the *Financial Times* is currently admitting that there has been no real growth since 1972.

What the Scott fiasco only touched on is the crucial importance of the arms trade to world imperialism. Since the collapse of the USSR, arms sales have become one of the main areas of rivalry in global trade. Despite condemning Saddam as "a Hitler" the West had been arming him for over a decade. The poison gas used in the Iran-Iraq War, in the Gulf War and against Kurdish civilians in Halabja came mainly from Western Europe. The financial cost of the Iran-Iraq War put Iraq massively into debt. We now know that Iraq was only three months away from total collapse when it attacked Kuwait. Saddam had first demanded \$10 billions from the Kuwaiti regime before the desperate decision to attack in 1990.

The Gulf War, and its aftermath, gave the USA an enormous advantage over its former allies as it increased its share of world trade in arms from 35% in 1990 to 55% in 1995. It also has controlled which of its "allies" benefits too. Germany, currently closer to the United States on most issues, has gained most with increased sales from 5.4% to 14.6% in 1995. The UK and France, at odds with the USA in Bosnia, have been less successful. French arms sales have actually fallen by a half to about 3.2% of the world total whilst the British, thanks to their loyal support of the US in the Gulf War modestly rose from about 5 to 7.3%. Much of this was a deal for £2.3 billions by Vickers, British Aerospace and GKN with Saudi Arabia. It is obviously no accident that a Saudi Islamic Fundamentalist who sends faxes from London was forced to shut up by Major's Government and is threatened with deportation to the Caribbean island of Dominica (where Saudi hit squads will do the rest).

Currently the race is on to supply the United Arab Emirates with 80 long-range strike aircraft for £4 billions. French Mirage 2000-5s, British Tornados and US F-16s are all competing, with Heads of State (including Clinton) phoning up Sheikh Sayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan to persuade him to take their toys. In the last twenty years \$600 billion dollars has been spent on arms by Middle Eastern states. And the real point of these deals is that the buyers are really buying Western political and military support for their regimes against both internal and external enemies. It is no accident that the squalidly brutal Gulf regimes (like Bahrain and the UAE) have British advisors on torture methods for their secret police. As *The Guardian* put it

*Adding 80 state of the art warplanes to the 97 the UAE possesses but cannot properly fly, will be useless. Buyer and seller will, in effect, admit that. For that is the real meaning of the defence pact: that go with such deals. The more the UAE buys, the readier the seller must be to come to its defence. (19.1.96)*

In short the arms sales are part of the creation of zones of imperialist competition. Those who thought that the world was a safer place after the Cold War ended need to look again. The old alliances are slowly unravelling, as the article in this issue on Ireland further underlines. We may have some time yet before the next major war but it is capitalism's only "solution" to its economic crisis. The working class will have to use this time well...



## IRA Bombings and British Government Manoeuvres Gangsters Against the Working Class



Commenting on the IRA ceasefire in *Workers Voice* 74 we wrote that all the major capitalist and imperialist interests were united in wanting a "peaceful solution" to the Irish conflict. We argued that the reason an agreement was only signed at this point in history was because

*...both the IRA and the British state have had their heads knocked together by the US since it is now in the US' interest to establish a more stable world order for it to dominate.*

Why has this conflict flared up again? The short answer is that it is part of the manoeuvres between the Great Powers which have been increasing since the Cold War ended.

### Why the British Government Blocked Talks

One thing is certain, as with other US-brokered peace deals, this rests on shaky ground. Imperialism is capable of bringing peace to this or that area for a given amount of time but that does not contradict the assertion that imperialism in general means war. The very nature of the rivalries for re-dividing the planet dictates that we have at best armed truces in the Middle East, Ireland, Rwanda, Somalia, ex-Yugoslavia and all the other areas where international intervention has taken place. And it will not be local forces alone which will break these truces but the great power god-fathers who sanction their satellites' actions.

**Internationalist  
Communist Review 14**

Contrary to Irish Nationalist mythology, the British Government has wanted to get rid of the Ulster question ever since Ulster became a drain rather than a benefit to British imperialism back in the 1960s. But what the British ruling class cannot afford is to be seen to be driven out of Ulster. They fear that this would undermine the very integrity of the United Kingdom. The IRA alone were not, and are not, capable of driving the British out. The history of the last quarter of a century amply demonstrates this. It was only the direct pressure of the USA under Clinton which could force the British to the negotiating table with Sinn Fein in the first place. But once the Major Government had got an IRA ceasefire it was in no hurry to give the IRA the credibility of winning a place at a conference table.

Added to this fundamental position has been the short-term weakness of the Tory Government who suddenly found themselves beholden to the Ulster Unionists in a whole range of areas. The unspoken deal was that barriers to further "progress" on peace would have to be raised in return for Unionist support at Westminster. The first of these was de-commissioning of arms (i.e. IRA arms and not those of the British state). When this was

brushed aside by the US Senator Mitchell's commission then the idea of an election (which would only reflect the fact that nationalists are in a minority in Ulster and this is where we came in) was thrown in as a further delaying tactic. Above all, though, it was the humiliation of dealing as equals with Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, which worried the British ruling class. The public admission that the British state ("we do not talk to terrorists") had held talks with Sinn Fein/IRA for years, and in secret, seems to have made the prospect of talking to them in public even less palatable.

### IRA Bombings

On the other hand, throughout these fifteen months, the IRA and Sinn Fein have become increasingly desperate. As we wrote in *Workers Voice* 74

*Despite the promised investments there are still problems which could hinder the normalisation process or entirely subvert it.*

The most glaring of these was that

*On the Republican side it is also possible that some of the armed groups will not play the game that their leaders have chosen. This could result in realignments and splits with sections still preferring the bullet to the ballot.*

Even before the so-called 'ceasefire' ended the IRA was asserting its authority as a proto-state with its vicious campaign against petty criminals and drug dealers in its 'own' areas. But this was only a holding operation to give the IRA's activists something to keep them busy until the British Government finally caved in. The long delay in starting talks made it clear that Sinn Fein was going nowhere. Even the bourgeois press has been predicting that the IRA would restart the bombing ever since the British stalled talks last summer. The Sinn Fein leadership became increasingly desperate in their threatening rhetoric as the stalemate continued. In fact they had been caught in a cleft stick. If they held back the IRA then they would get the continued



backing of US imperialism against the British (who are also under US pressure in Bosnia - see *Internationalist Communist Review* 14). If they didn't unleash the IRA then the British ruling class could go on stonewalling. After 15 months the IRA/Sinn Féin leadership were in a difficult position.

Now the IRA Military Council has been given a free hand to try to bomb the British back to the table. "Bombing the British" meant the same as bombing in Ulster - it was the working class that would be the victims. If there is any rationality, from the IRA point of view, to the bombings in London then it must have been intended to get the US back into the frame and force the British state to move on instituting "real talks" with Sinn Féin. The calculation has to be that the US imperialist interests (which are bound up with the domestic election campaign) means that the Clinton regime cannot be seen to be distancing itself further from Sinn Féin despite the atrocities. It is significant that Adams is being allowed back into the US (even if not given the official welcome of 1993). The IRA itself has now reached an impasse from which only behind the scenes US pressure on the British Government can rescue it. In the meantime the current climate could give the British state the opportunity of convening all-Ireland talks without Sinn Féin. This will not bring "peace" any more than the previous attempts but it will make it more difficult for the IRA to dominate the nationalist agenda.

### Behind the Manoeuvres stands Imperialism

In the era of imperialism, capitalism demands that every state fights for every scrap of surplus value, and this means also defending its territorial integrity, including the prevention of rivals from gaining footholds in areas of special concern. By any rational standards there is little further purpose to the war in Ulster. However, in the imperialist epoch, rationality comes up against an internecine fight for survival. It is the continued rivalry between two of the major powers, the US and Britain, that lies behind the continued struggle in Northern Ireland. It is no accident that the British Government which for twenty five years denied that "the Troubles" in Northern Ireland were a "war" (since it did not want "to dignify IRA terrorism") now repeatedly talk of "ending the war". This is because the end of the Cold War has brought the US greater freedom to meddle further into the Irish affairs of its former key ally and make the situation more critical for the British ruling class. It is not beyond imperialism to achieve a certain balance for a fixed time in a given place (whilst rivalries rage into war elsewhere, like Bosnia) but, at best we are talking of uneasy truces. The potential

for further conflict is never far away. This is the nature of an imperialist peace. Only the working class holds the key to ending this continual drift towards greater conflict.

### The Working Class is Internationalist

Those so-called socialists (who we would call the left wing of capitalism) who argue that it would somehow be progressive if Ireland were to be reunited have yet to say who it would be "progressive" for. The capitalists naturally all have their (false) hopes. A highly skilled but low-waged workforce in both Northern and Southern Ireland offers some incentive to the big capitals. The British would cut the costs of maintaining a garrison in the North and US capital would find that it could dominate the whole of the Irish economy more easily. However given the existence of the EC, and the fact that both the US and Britain will continue to vie for control in Dublin, little will change. Above all the capitalist economic crisis which led to the state of the demands by the Catholic working class for better conditions in the late 1960s has not gone away. A bit of investment in a small island is hardly likely to make a major impact on a world economy stagnating at the end of a cycle of accumulation.

A united Ireland would certainly not be progressive for the working class. Throughout the modern history of Ireland the bosses have been able to use the sectarian divide to create splits in the working class whichever section of the ruling class was dominant. The Ulster Protestant working class hardly lived in the lap of luxury after the Second World War, but in the Orange statelet they were divided from the workers of the Catholic minority who were denied housing and job rights on a massive scale, reinforced by the most gerrymandered electoral system in Europe. The Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin grew specifically on the basis of this divide and by the time the British ruling class woke up to the fact that this was actually going to lead to a threat to their own state, Ulster had already become a financial nightmare for British capitalism. If Ireland were to be united under capitalism it would only reverse the present situation with the UDA (financed by the British state) playing the role of the IRA. In any event the working class in both Éire and Ulster would gain nothing. They would still have the violence of Irish Republicanism and the British state visited upon them for causes which are not their own.

In the last century revolutionaries could give support to some national struggles. Although they were all bourgeois some of these struggles were progressive in the sense that they laid the basis for a further growth of capitalism and



therefore of the working class. Arguments about nationalism and national liberation are much clearer in the present imperialist epoch. There are today no national movements which expand capitalism. All are the tools of one or other imperialist interest. The only class which is universally opposed to this imperialism is the proletariat. The working class is, as Marx said, the negation of all nationality. He might have added that it becomes so only when it acts for itself, i.e. that revolutionary class which is alone capable of overthrowing the capitalist mode of production. Today capitalism continues to exist only through the growth of a monstrous barbarism. The decline in living standards for the masses, the wars, the famines, the nationalist atrocities are not mere accidents of history. They are the natural products of a social and economic system that is profoundly decayed. Only the working class, through its position as the collective producer class of the wealth of society, can offer an alternative. It can only offer this alternative if it can unite. This means not only striking collectively at the appropriate times on the economic front but also uniting against all the artificial divisions imposed on it by bourgeois society. Whereas in the last century, when capitalism was still growing progressively and laying the material basis for a

better society, national unification could represent a better future, today workers are offered nothing from capitalism's continued existence. Workers' interests now lie completely outside the society which we maintain with our labour power.

National oppression still undoubtedly exists. But the solution to that oppression cannot be found by addressing the problem in terms of the so-called "right of self-determination", i.e. as a question of establishing a new capitalist state. This is the road to more war and more barbarism. It allows capitalism to manipulate the working classes into siding with their own bourgeoisies. In short, there are no progressive nationalisms. The real solution is a lot more difficult and will take a lot longer. It can only come about through the destruction of the capitalist system on a global basis, through a recognition that "workers have no country" and through the international unity of the working class. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party has been created as a step towards this. We appeal to communists everywhere to enter into debate and discussion with us as part of the process of forming the future World Party of the Proletariat.

Jock

## Ireland - Polemic with the ICC

Regular readers of our press will know that we belong to what we call the proletarian political camp. In Britain the group with positions closest to ours is *World Revolution*, publication in Britain of the International Communist Current. However there are a number of significant differences which separate us. One of these concerns the method for analysing social reality. They have what we consider to be an idealist method which simply tries to fit any phenomena into a pre-existing schema. This goes against the whole grain of Marxism. Marx summed up the materialist conception of history in *The German Ideology*.

*It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts as it is with the empiricists (themselves still abstract) or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists.*

The ICC fall precisely into the idealist trap. Whilst we can agree with them the general premiss that we live in a period of growing imperialist antagonisms, a period which has increased in tension since the end of the so-called Cold War we disagree with their conception of seeing every faction of capital as part of the same state (just as they have done with the French strikes - see *Internationalist Communist*

*Review 14*). This idealist method ends by drowning in its own contradictions and Ireland is yet another example where the ICC have come to grief. In the past they told us that the IRA was "part of the British state". At other times they have told us that there is a "united front of the British state and the IRA" (*WR 161*). However this has now been transformed without explanation into a united front of the USA and the IRA! In *WR 192* we are told that in the face of the British refusal to implement the Mitchell Report

*The renewal of the IRA campaign was the US response.*

This is turning reality on its head. Sure enough, the renewal of the IRA campaign is part of the imperialist manoeuvring in Ireland but it is a weak IRA which is trying to revitalise US intervention on its behalf, not the other way around. However the ICC's penchant for plots get the better of them here and the result is to undermine any serious analysis of what is going on. This is not a small point. The ability of a revolutionary organisation to analyse reality is part of its function for the working class and, not for the first time, the ICC are offering us subjective explanations instead of material ones. In this article they actually go on to insist that the US motivation is simply to "teach the British Government a lesson" but the question is "What for?". The ICC don't explain this. The real reason is to demonstrate to the British bourgeoisie that it should not challenge US supremacy (in alliance with anyone else, like the French in Bosnia). The US has not won the Cold War for its former allies to now gain from what they all (wrongly) assume will be the relative stability of the "New World Order".

AD



## Job Seekers Allowance:

# Turning the Screws on the Unemployed ... and Employed

*The US stock market fell dramatically at the beginning of March. The reason? More workers had found jobs than the speculators expected. Cuts in interest rates would be postponed and they would not make such heavy profits. This trading in human misery isn't just the prerogative of the stock markets. As long term unemployment continues the state, throughout the West, is desperate to stigmatise the unemployed and thus cut benefits. The latest attack is the Job Seekers Allowance.*

This is just one more of the many steps in the dismantling of the welfare state taken by a crisis-ridden capitalism since 1977. Contrary to the leftist hangers on of the Labour Party this is not merely an ideological campaign by the Tories for less welfarism, in opposition to the Labour Party's 'greatest moment' of 1948, the establishment of central features of the welfare state. Basically the welfare state is now something that the strongholds of world capitalism cannot afford.

In the years after the war the welfare system gave workers the illusion that they had something to gain under state capitalism. Above all it helped to keep the class struggle 'within manageable bounds'.

But the welfare state was always an elaborate con. There was never any fund set up to pay for future pensions or unemployment. The whole business was funded by using direct taxation of the working class. The end of the boom has found capitalism out. Today with unemployment at higher levels than at any time since the Thirties, and the population age profile higher than ever, the welfare state is unravelling. It is like a dodgy insurance salesman who spent the premiums of the past fifty years on the horses. We, the punters, are the big losers.

The Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) is only the latest part of a concerted attack by capitalism's agents-in-office on the working class, both in work and out of work. It forms part of a long-term strategy to both reduce government expenditure (to the magic number of less than 35% of GDP) and to increase profitability through the lowering of wage rates. It has become a well established principle here, that although it may cost the government a little in the short-term, it is safer for the state to make changes in small steps rather than risk an awakening of class anger (as the Poll Tax did).

The rest of the measures are now planned to follow in October. These measures should all have come into force in April but, it is said, the need to train staff and installing new computer systems have delayed matters. It should be said also that staff have generally opposed the new

regime because it goes hand in hand with planned job cuts as part of a campaign by the government to reduce its own wages bill. Hence the rash of strikes in so-called 'benefit' offices.

## The new regime

**Unemployment Benefit and Income Support** will be abolished and replaced by the **Job Seekers' Allowance**. There will be two versions, **Contributory** and **Means Tested**. The government has said that this will be a simplification, replacing two benefits by one, it actually replaces two benefits by another two.

The **Contributory** version lasts for six months, unlike the one year of **Unemployment Benefit**. The **Adult Dependant Allowance**, will be abolished, thus those with enough NI (National Insurance) contributions will not be able to claim for partners. Those under 25 will receive the reduced rate, even if they have enough NI contributions, a similar situation to **Income Support** at present and for 16-18 year olds it will be even more difficult to draw benefits.

The **Means Tested** version is similar to **Income Support** but with a new set of thresholds for reducing benefit. The waiting period before receiving benefit will be two weeks instead of three days. Savings and redundancy will reduce benefit on a sliding scale from £3000 until the cut off point of £8000. Personal pensions will be taken into consideration, as will new rates with respect to part-time working. More important, though, are the new rules governing the other aspects of the benefits. As part of what the government calls a 'Stricter Benefits Regime', claimants will have to satisfy stringent new conditions before receiving JSA. They will have to set out a whole series of measures they will undertake to find work. This will include writing to a number of employers every week, telephoning a number of employers every week, visiting so many, turning up at the Jobcentre so many times, searching a series of newspapers every week, registering with employment agencies and so on and so forth. This will form part of a **Job Seekers' Agreement**. If staff do not believe that you are trying hard enough they can ultimately apply a **Job Seekers' Direction**. These are in-



structions to do a series of things, which could mean attending various courses or schemes, making themselves more 'presentable' to employers. Sanctions can be applied beyond this situation, i.e., a cut or removal of benefits. These sanctions are now far stiffer under JSA and are expected to be used far more often.

### The background and effects

The effects of these measures are likely to be in the first year - 70,000 claimants losing all entitlement to benefits, 95,000 being forced into means tested benefits, with 250,000 worse off in some way. Through these new rules the government hopes to cut the unemployment figures by 25,000 in that first year of operation and reap around £400 million within the first two years. They hope to cut the relevant social security spending from £1.3 billion to £0.7 billion. This, though, must be set beside the announced rise in NI employee contributions, from 9% to 10%, raising an extra £2.2 billion. In other words Chancellor Clarke wants us to pay more for less. Rather than address the problems of unemployment and the underlying reasons for it (something capitalism cannot do), they massage of the figures, or "reduce" them by coercion.

### The low-pay labour market

The government is anxious, in its own terms, to create a "flexible labour market" and "reduce welfare dependency". In the words of the late Keith Joseph,

*The only help we can give to the poor is helping them to help themselves; to do the opposite, to create more dependence, is to destroy them morally, whilst throwing an unfair burden on society.*

This "remoralising" of society, the return to "Victorian values", is seen in terms of a return to the Poor Law situation of the 1830s when poverty was criminalised. It is evidently moral to create a culture of low pay and destitution welfare benefits whilst handing out greater opportunities for the bourgeoisie to profit at others expense. Through these coercive measures and the new regime of 'in-work benefits' unemployed workers and other claimants will be thrown onto the labour market and forced into bidding at ever lower rates for work. Employers will be faced with a flood of people applying for work, alongside the chance to pay less because the government will top-up pay through various new measures. These new pilot schemes and extensions of older schemes include - Family Credit, Earnings Top Up, back to Work Bonus. In a Treasury statement the government had this to say:

*an efficient and flexible labour market is one in which unemployed people are helped and*

*encouraged to compete effectively for jobs...[and]...the unemployment benefits system promotes incentives to work and prevent dependency.*

Government claims that they are helping people back to work can be rejected. For example:

*only 60% of those leaving unemployment in 1993 went into work compared with 80-90% in the late 70s*

*Oxford Review of Economic Policy 1995.*

Where people did manage to find work it tended to be because opportunities for work arose through the forced devaluation of the pound, or people went into low paid work. It is also the case that there are fewer entering the labour market, fewer school-leavers, there are more going into further education, the population is not growing as much. Just to give further lie to government figures and claims concerning employment, in 1979 there were 8% of households without a working adult, in 1994 there were 19%, and this is likely to rise even further.

### Internationally

This attack is not confined to Britain alone. We must set in the context of other events, particularly within the capitalist heartlands in Europe and the USA. In France recently a wave of general strikes and mass demonstrations showed that the French working class were opposed to the state's 'reforms' of the welfare system (see *Revolutionary Perspectives*, 3rd series, no.1). Similarly in Italy, strikes and demonstrations have been the result of the a debt-ridden state's decisions to alter the pensions and social security regimes (see *Workers Voice* 75). This is no mention but two. In the USA, where welfare has been cut continually for twelve years, the gulf between the poorest and richest has never been higher. An American dream for the few and a capitalist nightmare for the many.

### The response

These attacks will not go away so long as the working class accepts them. However in the current climate it is relatively easy for the ruling class to keep the employed and unemployed apart. In the recent strikes by the benefit office staff there could be little solidarity with their so-called "clients" who they have to hassle increasingly on behalf of the state despite the common interests they have in getting rid of the JSA. What is required is for workers to look further than the immediate and recognise that the present system has nothing left to offer them. A change of government will change nothing. What is needed is the abolition of the system of production for profit which leads to super-exploitation on one hand and a waste of human potential on the other. It is time the capitalist system was made redundant. CDE



# The Socialist Labour Party - then and now

*The world will never be civilised so long as capitalism endures.*

*SLP, September 1914*

Capitalist companies have a whole panoply of laws dealing with copyright, patents and trademarks to prevent competitors from deceiving prospective purchasers. History, regrettably, does not prevent political organisations from working equivalent contricks. For decades the Stalinist, Maoist and Trotskyist groups confused workers by peddling varieties of state capitalism as "real living socialism" or even "communism". In Britain, the Scargill-led movement, anxious both to keep their followers within the traditions of Labourism and also to breathe fresh life into the lie that state intervention equals socialism (or at very least the road to socialism) opted for the name, Socialist Labour Party.

Whether by accident or design, Scargill, by choosing that title has perpetrated the type of mislabelling more normally used by the capitalist crooks who own the sweatshops churning out imitation designer clothing. The fact is, and one assumes that Scargill or some of his clique are aware of it, that unlike the present project of developing a fraction of the Labour left outside the confines of the official Labour Party, the original bearers of the name Socialist Labour Party were committed to organising to destroy capitalism rather than to administering it more kindly or efficiently.

## The first SLP - part of our revolutionary inheritance

The original SLP<sup>1</sup> was formed in 1903 at a conference called by the former Scottish divisional council of the Socialist Democratic Federation (SDF). One of the founding statements of the party, gives a clear indication of the grounds on how the SLP defined itself against the other erstwhile Socialist or Labour parties operating in Britain. As part of a *Manifesto to the Working Class* one of the founders of the new party, John Carstairs Matheson, defined Socialism in a way which clearly differentiated the SLP, and today's revolutionaries, from the leaders of the SDF, and Scargill and other brands of leftists. Defining socialism the SLP wrote,

*By this we do not mean what is variously called 'State Socialism', 'Public Ownership' or 'Municipalism' - that is, the ownership of certain public utilities by a community in which*

*capitalism is still dominant. A worker is as much exploited by a capitalist state or corporation as by a private employer - as post office or municipal employers can testify. We insist upon the political overthrow of capitalism as an absolutely necessary preliminary to the emancipation of the working class. Otherwise an industry controlled by an individual capitalist state differs from one controlled by an individual capitalist only in the superior powers of the former to rob and oppress those under its thrall.*

It is of interest that the original choice of the name SLP was not without some controversy. There was already in existence a party of the same name in the USA whose positions, particularly the emphasis on working-class struggle rather than electoralism, helped inspire the founders of the SLP. Living links between the US SLP and British socialists had been strengthened the previous year when James Connolly had carried out a speaking tour of the USA. The SDF opponents of the founders of the British SLP attempted to portray them as puppets of the American party but despite that the founding conference adopted the same title as their US counterparts.

Again, the self-definition carried out by the early SLP serves as an example of socialist clarity against the mystifiers and confusionists of both then and now. Separating the three elements of their chosen name they declared their meaning as:-

*Socialist because through Socialism alone can the workers be emancipated;  
Labour because by the labouring classes alone can Socialism be attained;  
Party because we are not merely an educational or propagandist body but stand for the political expression of our class interests, for the formation of the Socialist Republic.*

Naturally, there are formulations within those definitions which read strangely from our vantage point more than ninety years later. We could question what was meant by the "labouring classes which were to attain socialism". Similarly the question of a "Socialist Republic" may appear vague or even dangerous. However it must be borne in mind that, when considering the question of proletarian political power the



comrades in 1903 had only the brief and unique experience of the Paris Commune as an historic reference point against which to refine their theory and practice. The three points above actually stand out like a beacon of clarity when contrasted to the positions adopted by their contemporaries in the Independent Labour Party (ILP) or the Social Democratic Federation (renamed the British Socialist Party following the merger with some ILP branches in 1912).

### The first ten years - Marxists and militants

From the party's creation in 1903 until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 the SLP built its roots amongst some of the most class-conscious workers in a situation where there was a rising tide of industrial militancy.

Responding to this militancy and the appearance of new formations such as the shop stewards' movement the SLP intervened by arguing against the divisiveness of the old craft-based trade unions and in favour of all-embracing "Industrial Unionism". In its journal, *The Socialist* in June 1907 it explained its position as follows,

*Let us then organise industrially as well as politically for our class emancipation. Industrially, to build up within the womb of capitalism the foundations of the future state of society, reared upon the structure of our class interests, marching shoulder to shoulder, steadying up our class in their onward march to economic freedom.*

*Politically, to unseat the capitalist class from the power of government, to remove the legal enactments that today safeguard the rights of private property, to prevent, if possible, the capitalist class from using the physical power of the nation against the industrial workers of this or any other nation.*

In combining its intervention in the industrial organisations of the working-class with the Marxist understanding of the struggle for political power, the SLP also defined itself against the syndicalists who believed that industrial unionism could replace the political struggle and particularly the need for a revolutionary party.

Syndicalism was, nevertheless, able to attract a layer of workers who were repelled by the day-to-day practices of those, such as the early Labour M.P.s who sat in Parliament - described by Ben Tillet, a leader of the London dockers, in 1908 as "These unctuous weaklings [who] will go on prattling their nonsense while thousands are dying of starvation". In the same year the struggle between the SLP and the "pure" syndicalists became particularly critical with a split in the organisation, the Advocates of Industrial Unionism which the SLP had helped

launch 12 months previously.

### Marxist educational circles

The SLP, from its inception, demanded a high degree of clarity and political agreement from its members. In its *Aims and Methods* it described how

*A party which has undertaken the work of revolutionising society must be dominated not only by a common purpose but also a common plan of action. A revolutionary socialist party .... must present not only the appearance but the reality of an intelligent disciplined unity.*

In line with its understanding for the need for revolutionary theory, the early SLP also made a major contribution to the working class through its institution of educational circles. Classes were started in many working-class areas particularly in Scotland. The classes were organised rigorously with a formal structure ensuring that worker militants were equipped with a thorough grasp of basic Marxism.

As well as formal classes and examinations the SLP also organised correspondence courses for isolated militants. In their educational activities the SLP were soon joined by others such as John Maclean of the SDF and the Plebs League which originated in 1909 amongst radical socialist students at Ruskin College, Oxford.

Up to 1914 the overall experience of the SLP was certainly a positive one. The historic tests for its claim to stand as part of the revolutionary working-class movement came with the outbreak of war and in November, 1917, with their response to the outbreak of proletarian revolution in Russia.

### A socialist response to imperialist war

In common with the rest of the European socialist movement, the majority of erstwhile socialists in Britain collapsed into social chauvinism, siding with their "own" national ruling class, at the outbreak of the First World War. In contrast the SLP opposed the war from the position of proletarian internationalism. The SLP's journal, *The Socialist* wrote in September 1914,

*Our attitude is neither pro-German nor pro-British, but anticapitalist and all that it stands for in every country of the world. The capitalist class of all nations are our real enemies, and it is against them that we direct all our attacks.*

In the same edition the leading article poured scorn on those who talked nonsense about fighting to preserve civilisation,

*No explanation is offered as to what civilisation has done for the workers that they should*



fight for it. To the majority, civilisation means



## The Socialist Programme



In Karl Marx  
The Socialist Labour Press  
50 Renfrew Street  
Glasgow

10 or  
12 hours a day  
in a factory or on a rail-  
way, or 8 hours in a coal mine,  
with a hovel to sleep in and the prospect  
of being clubbed by the police or shot down by  
the military if they make too much fuss about  
it ..... A class that can contemplate un-  
moved the sufferings of the workers, their  
wretched conditions and pauper deaths, is not  
civilised. A class that can callously consign  
millions of their fellow creatures to mutilation  
and death for the furtherance of their own  
ends is not civilised. The world will never be  
civilised so long as capitalism endures.

The Socialist also printed in November, 1914, an article from the *Berner Tagwacht* by the Dutch revolutionist, Anton Pannekoek, calling for the creation of a new International.

Although, as an organisation, the SLP clearly stood against social chauvinism there are a number of issues where questions need to be raised. Firstly, at least one prominent member, John Muir, the editor of the Socialist, was initially in favour of certain defenceist positions. Secondly, the position taken by their conference in April 1915 seems to reflect a position nearer to social pacifism than to revolutionary defeatism. Leading from that resolution many SLP militants were to become conscientious objectors rather than fighting for internationalism

alongside their fellow workers.

If the latter positions would tend to place the SLP in an equivalent position to the right rather than left-wing of the International Socialist conference held at Zimmerwald the SLP's revolutionary credentials were reconfirmed by their response to the Russian October revolution.

## Support for the Russian Revolution

During 1917 the SLP journal consistently argued for and then welcomed a specifically working class revolution in Russia. Its support for and agreement with those working to that end is shown by the articles written by Lenin which appeared in its June and September issues. Indeed *The Socialist* claimed the Russian Revolution as vindication of the SLP's own political method. Following a further article from Lenin in the edition of February, 1918 the March edition carried the comment that

*The SLP is the only party in this country which has compelled the ILP and BSP to realise that socialist tactics do not mean how to juggle men into Parliament. Socialist tactics mean the education of the proletariat and the organisation of the political weapon to destroy capitalism, backed by the industrial unions taking over the means of production*

*For years the SLP has been sneered at and jeered at, but now Russia, in the transition towards the Socialist Republic shows the SLP is right*

By December, 1918 *The Socialist* was declaring,

*We are denounced as 'British Bolsheviks' We do not seek to conceal our views. We are proud of the title. The SLP is the only political organisation that stands wholeheartedly and uncompromisingly for the Soviet idea. Let it be known: We are the British Bolsheviks*

## SLP and the founding of the CPGB

Although the Russian revolution could be fairly claimed to vindicate the SLP against the evolutionism and parliamentary cretinism of many of their opponents it is ironic that it was the tortuous, and sometimes Byzantine, moves to establish a section of the Comintern in Britain which marked the end of the SLP as a serious political force.



It was no coincidence that internationally the conferences and negotiations which took place during 1920 took place as the revolutionary wave which had swept Europe (and other parts of the world) was already ebbing. Indeed, during 1920, at the same time as British delegates were arguing against affiliation to the Labour Party at the 2nd Congress of the Comintern Lenin's *Left Wing Communism* appeared in Britain.

The appearance of Lenin's ill-informed and politically unhelpful document together with direct interference from the Comintern produced a situation where only a small minority of the SLP entered into the embryonic CP (heavily dominated by ex-BSPers) in the summer of 1920. A more substantial element led by Gallacher (who had supported the abstentionist and anti-Labour position when departing for Moscow but arrived back accepting Lenin's positions "as a child takes the rebuke of a father") fused with the CP at a second Unity Conference early in 1921.

Although the SLP retained a formal existence after the traumas of 1920-21 it was not able to effectively compete with the CPGB. One of its few remaining roles was to act as a temporary stopping place for John Maclean on his way to the Scottish Workers Republican Party and Scottish nationalism.

### Failings and shortcomings

Like any Marxist organisation the history of the SLP should not be seen as a balance sheet where every figure is positive. Only idealist scenario mongers with no connection to the living development of the working class prefer to rewrite history to force it into the straitjacket of their own conceptions (and misconceptions).

Certainly, we can with the benefit of hindsight, consider the tactics taken in 1920-21. We could also explore further the exact nuances of the SLP's attitude to Industrial Unionism and the Shop Stewards Movement. There were certainly debates within the Party about the precise attitude to elections and the acceptance of elected office. There is also evidence that the party's original emphasis on the importance of full political agreement and commitment from its own members may not have been fully adhered to in later years. The presence of pacifist strands in the SLP's opposition to the war has been mentioned earlier. On balance, though, these mistakes and omissions appear primarily as honest failings by sincere, committed and serious revolutionaries who had a real presence within the class struggles of their times. As such the history of the real SLP is part of our revolu-

tionary heritage which does not deserve to be besmirched by those who now choose to use the name.

### Scargill steals our history

Writing about the early years of the original SLP, Challinor commented that,

*the SLP encouraged all its branches to hold regular outdoor meetings .... Sometimes difficulties were experienced in getting the initial crowd to stop and listen. One speaker in Liverpool used to overcome this by shouting, at the top of his voice 'I've been robbed! I've been robbed!' Quickly an inquisitive audience would assemble, and he would explain how the thieves were the capitalists.*

Some ninety years later our old comrade's party name has been robbed by Scargill's worshippers of state capitalism.

We will leave Scargill and Co. to disappear into political oblivion dragging the misappropriated name with them. For revolutionary Marxists the essence of the old SLP's politics, the struggle for working-class self-emancipation and opposition to all reformism and nationalism, lives on in our programme and the struggle for a communist future. **KT**

### Notes

1 From this point onwards all references to Socialist Labour Party (SLP), except where stated otherwise, refer to the revolutionary proletarian party of earlier this century.

2 This and all subsequent quotes from SLP literature, except where stated, are taken from *The Origins of British Bolshevism* by Ray Challinor.

3 Connolly was later to move to Ireland where he founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party whose politics attempted to combine elements of Marxism with Irish nationalism. Connolly was executed by British imperialism following the defeat of the Nationalist Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916.

### Internationalist Communist Review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

is our central organ in English. Each individual issue is £2.00. Back issues are available (see back cover for contents). *ICRI4* is the current issue. It contains articles on

Globalisation and the Capitalist Crisis  
Analysis of the French Strikes  
Polemics with the ICC

Amadeo Bordiga's Last Speech to the Comintern

Bosnian "Peace"

Hobbsbawm's *Age of Extremes*





Nationalisation, saving capitalism from the working class

Despite Arthur Scargill's exaggerated comparison with Keir Hardie's first attempt to win a seat in Parliament, the few hundred votes cast for Brenda Nixon in the Hemsworth by-election hardly provide a great start for Scargill's breakaway "Socialist Labour Party". In truth the creation of this new organisation is of little consequence for the working class and has nothing whatsoever to do with the fight for socialism. It has everything to do with the manoeuvres and manipulations of the left wing of capitalism.

As New Labour prepares to manage today's restructured capitalism Arthur Scargill wants to turn the clock back to the "good old days" of a Party manipulated by the trades union bosses and an economy dominated by nationalised industries. It's not hard to see why. With the rapid decline of the coal industry following on the defeat of the 1984-5 miners' strike and the last ditch campaign to "Save Our Pits" in 1992 Scargill's own power base has been eroded. When Labour finally ditched Clause 4 (i.e. any pretence that a Labour government would renationalise) and undermined the union bloc voting system, with one member one vote, the writing was on the wall for old trade union wheeler dealers like Scargill. Scargill is an archetypal Stalinist (CP)/Labourite whose favourite method of operating is through the unions and whose vision of socialism is confined to a lot of nationalisation plus a good deal of welfarism. Not surprisingly the new party's most fruitful ground for recruitment so far has been amongst the upper echelons of other industrial unions under threat from capital's continuing process of denationalisation and restructuring. *The Guardian* of February 17th reported that 7 out of 12 of the RMT (Rail Maritime and Transport union) Executive have affiliated to the SLP. Behind this, of course, is the assumption that they could bring with them the bloc vote of the union membership.

This state old CP tactic is the only thing Scargill really knows. Above all else he is a corporatist. His whole thinking revolves around defending the interests of 'his' industry within the framework of British capitalism and for workers to equate their interests with the interests of the

## Scargill's New Old Labour Party Another State Capitalist Diversion

industry they happen to work in. The whole thing seems a lot more plausible if you work in a state-owned industry and you think that state ownership is a step towards socialism. This was the con-trick performed by British capitalism in its spate of nationalisations after the 2nd World War. It was part of the basis for the so-called post-war settlement which in reality meant that in return for keeping wage demands within 'realistic boundaries' and co-operating over the implementation of redundancies, the unions would have a say in how their industry and the economy as a whole was run. Throughout the Sixties, therefore, the NUM co-operated with the government to close down pits in the North East of England and South Wales, devastating whole communities and officially leaving villages classed as 'Category D' to go to coal-rack and ruin. In the Seventies Scargill himself was part of the NUM Executive that helped Labour draw up its *Plan for Coal*. (More job cuts, of course, without a single 'ordinary' miner having a say.) When it came to the 1984 miners' strike this was a completely different ball game, not just because there was now a rampant Tory government but because the capitalist crisis was becoming so severe that the old state subsidies had to go: a radical solution was demanded by capital. The Thatcher government was ready to find one and after defeating the steel workers in 1979/80 and backing down against the miners in 1981 it prepared to break the back of the whole of the British working class by engaging in a definitive battle with the miners. It was a battle whose outcome they knew was crucial for the future confidence and capacity to fight off the whole working class; it would determine how easily they could implement plans to radically "weed out dead ducks" and restructure the economy as a whole. Whilst the working class throughout Europe and beyond waited to see the outcome of this protracted contest in the class war the NUM leader confined the issue to "Coal not Dole". There were no calls for support from the rest of the working class. There was no acknowledgment that there was a wider issue at stake, the issue of how the working class as a whole could resist capitalism's attacks. Instead, the future founder of the "really socialist" Labour Party produced figures to support his case about the profitability of British deep-mined coal and showed his internationalism by railing against "cheap foreign imports".

In 1984-5 the possibility of a political programme for the working class to overthrow



capitalism could not and did not enter Scargill's head. Neither has it a decade later. Like the proverbial dinosaur he is looking for the status quo ante. He doesn't realise that the unions are of more limited use to capitalism a stage further on in the capitalist crisis. Now their only function is to oversee job cuts and wage cuts and where necessary contain workers' militancy. With the declining 'sovereignty' of national states in a dramatically extended globalised economy there is no place for beer and sandwiches at no. 10. Scargill's political initiative is certainly a minor side-show but this is not — as media commentators cheerfully claim — because the very idea of socialism or communism is out of the window. What is out of the window is the notion that socialism = nationalisation and that it can be built by gradually extending the power of the capitalist state.

### The response from Labour's Left hangers-on

In this context it is worth noting the response from the far Left of capitalism's political spectrum (The reconstructed and unreconstructed Stalinists, Trotskyists and semi-Trotskyists from Militant to the SWP). By and large these are the organisations who were most vociferous about defending Clause 4. However, now that a party is coming into being based on a return to Clause 4 they have responded pretty coolly. This is partly Scargill's own doing. Whilst Militant and other more hard-line Trotskyists like Workers Power were interested initially they were not impressed with the proposed draft constitution of the SLP admitting affiliation only by trades union bodies and banning members of other political organisations. Others, such as the recently-formed (1992) *Socialist Appeal*, which professes to be the "Marxist voice of the labour movement" are plainly embarrassed. On the one hand pompously proclaiming that Arthur Scargill has "certainly posed things sharply", on the other concluding that "the task for socialists means fighting for socialist policies in the unions" (From the SA Dec/January Editorial). The most acrobatic position of all, however, must surely come from the Socialist Workers' Party. In general this party, which avows "there is no parliamentary road" to socialism, is a staunch supporter of Labour during elections. So, we are assured, it will be in the next election .. at least in most places:

*And Socialist Worker will still be urging a Labour vote in most areas at the next election.*

What about the other places? Ah, well, as it happens SWP members around Barnsley and Hemsworth are intimately bound up in Arthur's new venture, ("When SWP members in the Hemsworth constituency in West Yorkshire

were approached to nominate the SLP candidate, Women Against Pit Closure activist Brenda Nixon, they were happy to do so." *Socialist Review* February, 1996 p.14.) The upshot? Well,

*Socialist Worker will support an SLP candidate in Hemsworth, and would do so in similar solidly labour voting constituencies in future elections. [Both separate quotes are from the same article in Socialist Worker 20.1.96]*

Despite the SWP's reservations about Scargill not having broken with Labourism and relying too much on parliament, the non-parliamentary supporter of Labour "in most areas" is happy to back the SLP wherever they are in danger of losing members to Scargill's outfit.

Leaving aside all the manoeuvring going on, let's be clear. What all these Leftist organisations have in common is the belief that Labour (old, new or still-born) and the trades unions have something to do with the working class because they are all part of that ephemeral 'labour movement' (A 'movement' which has never managed to move the working class away from capitalist ground). Most of them are capable of revolutionary phrase-mongering when it suits them but when it comes down to political activity, working inside the trades union bureaucracies and fishing about in the Labour Party are standard practice (The only debate amongst them is how far there are other arenas of political activity). They have no idea about how revolutionary change can come about because they are so busy finding a niche in the supposedly "labour" organisations whose very existence is bound up with the preservation of capitalism (e.g. defence of the economy) and the prevention of any independent political movement of the working class. For anybody wanting to be part of a genuine revolutionary alternative a first step is to recognise that Labour, old-style or new, stands for the continuation of capitalism against the working class.<sup>2</sup> The second is to realise that capitalism's continuing crisis means the need to overthrow the whole rotting system is more pressing than ever. To genuine revolutionaries, a world away from Labourism and its hangers-on on the Left, Scargill's attempt to launch a damp squib on May 1st is just another reminder of this.

ER

### Notes

1. For a deeper analysis of the 1984-5 Miners' Strike see "Lessons of the Miners Strike" in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 22 (Second Series)

2. For readers who are not already convinced of this, or who think there is something socialist about Clause 4, we recommend some of the recent back issues of *Workers Voice*. For example, 'Labour v the Workers' in WV75, 'Clause 4 Debate: Defend Socialism! Scrap Labour!' in WV76; 'Labour and the Workers' in WV77, 'New Labour: Capitalism's Old Reserve Party' in WV79. All available from the group address at 50 p. per copy plus postage.



# From Capitalism to Communism

## A Popular Outline of the Period of Transition

**T**he period of transition from capitalism to communism is one of the most difficult areas for discussion amongst revolutionaries. In the first place we have only very limited historical experience of workers' rule and workers' democracy in action. The Paris Commune, and the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 are the only time when workers have given a glimpse of how they would run a new society. The ultimate failure of the October Revolution of 1917 in the early 1920s has meant that usually discussions have centred around negative aspects of the issue. Consequently a lot of emphasis has been placed on avoiding the mistakes of the past, including trying to avoid the specific circumstances which led to the degeneration of the workers' state during the Russian Revolution. As a result, a lot of the discussion has been characterised by what should not be done, or what should be avoided, rather than laying down principles for the creation of socialism.

In the second place, for Marxists,

*The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination*

Marx *The German Ideology*

In short there is for Marxists a healthy scepticism about making utopian prescriptions. However, although it is impossible to draw up exact blueprints for the transition to communism (since we can have no idea of the specific conditions out of which the proletarian revolution will emerge and can set no barriers to any future discoveries the proletariat may make) it is nevertheless important to formulate broad principles for the creation of the new society. After all one of the most important differences between ourselves and the Left of capital<sup>1</sup> is that our goal is a classless society made up of freely associated producers, whilst for them the struggle itself is the goal, which is why we are revolutionary and they are not. Without a vision of communism, of a classless society, it is impossible to fight in the vanguard of the working class.

As a mode of production capitalism is riddled with contradictions which it finds impossible to overcome. As Marx showed in *Capital*, it is a dynamic mode of production which is unable to overcome its economic crises and can only survive by continuing its increasingly vicious attacks on the working class, with war as the ultimate expression of both its dominance and its bankruptcy. It has advanced scientific development to levels which could never have been imagined at its birth and yet it is still unable to feed the population it has created.

Above all, it is responsible for the creation of a global class upon which it is wholly dependent for the creation of the source of its wealth, surplus value. It realises that the working class has the potential to be its grave digger; indeed during some periods of the class struggle it appears to be more acutely aware of this fact than does the working class itself.

The situation of the proletariat is unique in history. For the bulk of its existence it remains locked within capitalism, dominated by bourgeois ideology<sup>2</sup>. Yet it alone is capable of freeing humanity from class societies by means of revolution. Unlike previous classes, the proletariat cannot build up its power base in the confines of the old society. As Marx first noted, its unique situation makes it the only truly revolutionary class. It has nothing materially to defend under capitalism since its only means of livelihood is to sell its labour power. It has no property relations to defend. This makes it the harbinger of a propertyless mode of production, i.e. communism. Unlike the bourgeoisie, which owned workshops and coalmines etc. (i.e. the economic basis of a new means of production) and which was able to build up its economic base under feudalism long before it organised itself as a class to make political demands, the proletariat must carry out revolutionary political changes before it can implement economic ones. As a result, it must rely on its consciousness to make the revolution; it must be aware, at least for the most part, of the type of society it needs to build to replace capitalism.



## The State

For Marxists the state is a "product and manifestation of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms". It is an organ of class rule "an organ for the oppression of one class by another" (Lenin, *State and Revolution*).

*Proclamation of the Paris Commune March 28th 1871*



*One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., 'the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes'*

Marx and Engels

Although this may seem obvious to those millions of workers around the globe who have faced state repression in one form or another, Marx had to fight sundry pseudo-socialists, including those in the German Social Democratic Party, who peddled the myth that the state was somehow neutral, that it stood above classes and that as a result it could be simply taken over by the working class by democratic means. This same lie is pushed by those groups who urge the working class to defend democracy and democratic "rights" today. For Engels democracy was not worth fighting for any more than absolute monarchy; "In reality" he wrote

*the state is nothing but a machine for the oppression of one class by another, and indeed in the democratic republic no less than in the monarchy*

Engels, *Introduction to The Civil War in France*

Marx saw that bourgeois democracy was merely an instrument whereby the oppressed were given the chance every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class should represent and repress them in Parliament. The modern state has become an extremely sophisticated form of class domination and the age of global communications has given the bourgeoisie more opportunities than ever to draw the working class into its petty arguments and its completely irrelevant and useless ways of dealing with the horrendous mess it continually creates. Whatever forms of trickery it uses to lull the proletariat into believing the present state means freedom and democracy, Lenin's statement still stands:

*Bourgeois states are most varied in form, but their essence is the same: all these states whatever their form, in the final analysis are inevitably the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*

## The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Marx

*deduced from the whole history of socialism and the political struggle that the state was bound to disappear and that the transitional form of its disappearance would be the 'proletariat organised as the ruling class'*

(Lenin, *State and Revolution*)

Since the Russian Revolution the bourgeoisie and their hangers-on have used the phrase "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" to try to convince workers that communism means autocratic rule, with Stalinism being held up as the ultimate example. The bourgeoisie are extremely skilled at using communist phraseology and turning it to mean its exact opposite. For Marx and Engels all states were the dictatorship of one particular class over society, and for them the Dictatorship of the Proletariat meant the dominance of the revolutionary working class over its class enemies and over society as a whole. Little wonder then that the bourgeoisie take such exception to it.

For both Marx and Engels the Paris Commune of 1871 provided the first real glimpse of how the dictatorship of the proletariat would look. They had previously believed that the working class would be able to take over the running of the bourgeois state and use it to introduce communism. However in the Commune a revolutionary form of democracy was discovered: that of delegatory democracy. Unlike parliamentary democracy where the representative is elected for a number of years and can do what she or he likes for that time delegatory democracy subjects every delegate to the mandate of those who sent that delegate to the class-wide body (in 1871 this was the Commune, in 1905 it was the soviet). If a delegate fails to carry out the mandate then and cannot satisfy those who voted for her/him then that delegate can be recalled and another sent as replacement.

The Paris Commune provided another significant historical experience for the working class. Although it was organised on the old Parisian ward system, it nevertheless provided Marx and Engels with the insight that the working class, once it had come to power, could not survive by managing the old state machine and that to hold onto power it must do away with the old repressive machinery which the bourgeoisie had previously used against it.

*One thing especially was proved by the Com-*



mine, viz., "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes"

Marx and Engels 1872 Introduction to the German edition of the *Communist Manifesto*

The bourgeois state apparatus must be smashed. The Soviets of 1905 and 1917 were to show revolutionaries how the delegatory system could be the key to the disappearance of the state.

The workers "state" is like no other state throughout history, since it can only ever be a semi-state. From its very beginning it moves towards its own abolition by working for the abolition of class antagonisms. Although some previous states have been progressive (such as the French state during the Revolution of the

A basic rule of the proletarian state is the absolute eligibility of all offices and the recallability of all functionaries at any time and with no exception. The bourgeoisie as a class will necessarily be excluded from all political participation. Only as they cease to be bourgeois and become integrated into the working class (which is itself being abolished through the elimination of all class distinctions) will the former bourgeois be integrated into the soviets. And unlike any other system of government in history the new democracy positively demands the fullest possible participation of the entire adult population in the process both of making decisions and carrying those decisions out. The technological developments in mass communications which are weapons of the bourgeoisie under capitalism will be transformed into instruments of global proletarian emancipation enabling direct participation of millions in the debate about the future of society.

Once other strata have been assimilated into the proletariat and its class enemies have been defeated, the semi-state will wither away since it has no further reason to exist. Only then can communism, in the fullest sense of the word, become possible. There will gradually be no role for a political state once global revolution has ended class antagonisms and eventually the state will be reduced to the role of a rational administrator of human activities. The state will then cease to exist, as Engels noted:

*Society, which will reorganise production on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers, will put the whole machinery of the state where it will then belong: into a museum of antiquities, by the side of the spinning wheel and the bronze axe*



"The first decree of the Commune ... was the suppression of the standing army, and the substitution for it of the armed people." Marx *The Civil War in France*

late eighteenth century) the proletarian semi-state will only continue to exist as long as it needs to defend itself against its class enemies. For the first time in history the state will represent the interests of the propertyless majority over the minority and it will thus have no property relations to defend. It is this latter difference which explains for Lenin why the proletarian state is "no longer a state in the proper sense of the word" (Lenin, *Marxism and the State*). Its democracy is based on the election of delegates from workplace (and, in future, possibly area-based) committees who are given a mandate by those who have elected them and are instantly recallable. This means that they cannot become a political class separate from the rest of society and they receive no special rewards in terms of privileges etc. for carrying out this duty.

### The Armed Working Class

The whole working class will be armed since the military defence of the revolution will rest with the working class itself and not with a standing army. The lack of a professional army is one of the reasons why the proletarian state is already a semi-state. In previous states professional armies have been instruments in the hands of a ruling class which through its control of the means of production has been able to use the wealth of society to create a force to conserve its own rule against the rest of society. In the proletarian state the armed workers councils are the defenders of the revolution and act as such.

The revolution can only advance through the development of an internationalist class con-



sciousness. It will not spread at the point of bayonets as the bourgeois revolution could at the time of Napoleon. The proletarian revolution has to be carried out by the workers themselves and therefore the communists struggle for the extension of the revolution through the development of class consciousness and organisation. The defeat of the Red Army at Warsaw in 1920 shows that the workers in any given area must be politically prepared to fight against their own bourgeoisie if the revolution is to advance. The proletariat from one area can assist their comrades elsewhere when called upon for support but armed intervention is no substitute for revolutionary consciousness.

### Party and Soviet Relationship

The proletarian revolution is unique since it is necessary for the revolutionary class to be conscious of its historical role almost from the start. Yet it will make the revolution carrying much of "the old shit" (Marx), or the ideology which has been drummed into it for generations, in its

In this respect the working class also has to learn from its past errors. During the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks made a crucial error when they created a separate executive of the Party (the so-called Council of People's Commissars or Sovnarkom) which took precedence over that of the Soviets, the Vsesik. This error was the product of the situation. Never before in history had the working class given such unambiguous support to a proletarian party. The only models were those of bourgeois parliaments and Cabinets. This separation of the executive from soviet control was not so apparent when the revolution was progressing. However, by late 1920, the Bolsheviks found themselves in a situation where the bulk of the revolutionary working class had been killed in the civil war, where the revolution was isolated and where the work of the Party itself was suffering (due to the efforts of many of its more active cadres to breathe life back into the Soviets).

The Party could not abandon the revolution once it began to decline, and by virtue of the role of Sovnarkom, the Bolshevik Party apparatus increasingly became synonymous with the state, with disastrous consequences for future communists everywhere. The emergence of the Stalinist dictatorship and the rise of a new ruling class beholden only to this Party which was no longer proletarian has been a dead weight for three generations of communists to fight against and its impact has not been shaken off even now.

This is one of the most important lessons of the Russian Revolution. The Party's first role is to push for the intensification of the consciousness of the proletariat, and those Party members working inside the Soviet will push forward workers' expectations by putting forward

revolutionary demands and organising the fight for a new society. The relationship between the Party and its members in the Soviets will not always run smoothly. This is not necessarily unhealthy, since debate is the lifeblood of revolution. As long as the revolution is going forward this will not endanger either party or state. And if the revolution is in retreat no amount of formal guarantees can save the state. The Party's role of defence of the communist programme means it has to remain separate from the state at such points. In every way and at all times the Party leads and guides the proletariat in its bid to rid itself of the "muck of ages", the ideology of the enemy class.

Although it is inevitable that the left wing of capital will attempt to sabotage the work of the Soviets and try to hamper the working class (as



*Soviet Elections  
The Putilov Works,  
Petrograd 1918*

head. As capitalism has decayed, the bourgeoisie everywhere has systematically destroyed independent working class culture, and its state has increasingly come to administer every area of social activity. The Party's role in giving back to the class the lessons of its own history has thus become even more vital. The Party through the activity of its individual militants has an international role in leading and organising the working class as it carry out its historical tasks. But the Party as a separate body in itself cannot take this role over; it cannot become the state in the revolutionary period but must remain separate and distinct from it. The Party remains the guardian of the communist programme which the militants try to develop within the class-wide organs.



did the German Social Democratic Party during the revolutionary outbreaks in Germany), the damage they do can be limited as long as the revolution is moving forward. As Marx saw in an earlier epoch,

*In every revolution he wrote there intrude mere bawlers, who, by dint of repeating year after year the same set of stereotyped declamation against the Government of the day, have sneaked into the reputation of revolutionist of the first water. As far as their power went, they hampered the real action of the working class, exactly as men of that sort have hampered the full development of every previous revolution. They are an unavoidable evil. With time they are shaken off.*

Marx, *The Civil War in France*

There can be little doubt that our enemies will be more sophisticated than ever in the revolutionary period. One of the main tasks of the international revolutionary party will be to expose the empty rhetoric of pseudo-revolutionary phrasemongers and, at every step, point clearly and practically the way forward.

### The Economy

Unlike all previous revolutions that of the proletariat has to be global or it will fail quickly. The experience of the Russian Revolution has shown that a single proletarian bastion, even when it has been successful militarily, cannot survive alone in a hostile capitalist economy. For the revolution to have any chance of success it must take place in several of the main capitalist states simultaneously. As we wrote in *Revolutionary Perspectives 13*

*Although there is certainly armed struggle and even pitched battles during the communist revolution, there is no possibility of the workers engaging and defeating capital in a global civil war; on this terrain the defeat of the proletariat would be short and the curtain-raiser for barbarism.... Certainly workers in any area must intervene to help adjacent communist uprisings, but the creation of the first steps of a communist economy are a better potential weapon and help than any amount of military support given by one group of workers to another.*

The period of transition must start wherever the proletariat has seized power. Some might argue that in this period we are still at the "civil war stage" when fighting for the political defeat of the bourgeoisie on a world scale is more important than any measures of socialisation that might be possible. Whilst it is true that the extension of the revolution to areas where the proletariat is prepared is a priority, this does not mean that the victorious working class will not be forced to carry out some measures which will initiate the period of transition to communism.

This is not speculation but is based on the actual experience of the working class in Russia in 1917-18. The Bolsheviks led the revolution in Russia on the premise that this was the first step in a world revolution. They knew in 1917 that the revolution had to spread. Their attitude was that until it did there was little point in trying to advance too far down the road towards socialism. This sounded logical but reality was to teach them differently. Not only did the capitalists not take a neutral attitude to the soviet power they did everything in their power to sabotage the economy. It is thus necessary immediately to seize the means of production from both private individuals and the capitalist state in order to run them in the interests of society. Contrary to the propaganda of the left wing of capitalism, this socialisation is not the same as nationalisation since nationalisation ("it's for the good of the country" as the Labour Party would say) benefits one national section of the ruling class in direct opposition to the global working class. Socialisation will need to be planned and coordinated as far as possible by the soviets themselves.

In the first six months of the Russian Revolution various experiments were attempted by the working class, most with serious weaknesses (including self-management of the railways, where workers allocated themselves the rolling stock as housing!). The important lesson here is that socialisation of the means of production must be coordinated by the elected organs of the class for the whole class. Both production and administration must take place collectively as a general social function; if every locality decides its own production tasks in isolation then the result will be chaos, and inevitably competition between producers will arise. Likewise with administration, if it does not take place collectively then the costs will be borne by each separate distribution cooperative and it will fail.

The councils will have to ensure that all those who are able are integrated into the production process. This has a two-fold purpose; if unproductive elements (including the unemployed) are integrated into the productive process then the working class will be strengthened and the burden of work eased for everyone; this allows more time for workers to participate fully in its debates, and the old distinctions between work and control over social issues will disappear. The proletariat will be unable to survive unless it absorbs other strata into itself; those deemed to be "professionals" should be integrated also as a safeguard against them joining with the counter-revolution. It should also be noted that technology now allows the proletariat to carry out much of the work which was previously so technical it was left to "experts". Many of the technicians and white collar workers described by Lenin are increasingly becoming part of the



working class as a result of the de-skilling process and many of the strata previously cushioned by capitalism now find themselves under attack and increasingly being pushed towards the working class.<sup>3</sup> Technology now available could enable the proletariat to carry out not only previously skilled work (such as some medical functions) but it can also be used for much of the dirty and dangerous work unsuitable for human beings (such as mining).

The agrarian issue is rather more complex. As we stated in *Internationalist Communist Review* 7:

*The historical development of capitalist farming has not led to the predominance of pure wage labour-capital relations.*

*A rural proletariat does exist in the advanced capitalist states and the rural semi-proletariat and small peasantry of the periphery can all be integrated into the proletariat. But the bulk of the world's food is currently produced by highly developed capitalist farming. In the US in 1986 2 million out of 2.4 million farms were farmed by the farmer and his family with only a handful of labourers. These "high level technology peasants" are heavily subsidised by the US state and naturally highly reactionary. No programmatic or political concessions can be made to capitalist farmers to win their support.*

It is important to stress here that as with the nationalisation of other capitalist concerns, nationalisation of the land is not a step towards socialism. To socialise the land is to return it to the community of associated producers; to nationalise it, as Lenin states, is merely to transfer rent to the state. As with other sectors there can be no national solution: the abolition of imperialist relations with the destruction of capitalism is the only guarantee that land will be used to produce food for humanity as a whole.

It could take several generations for the means of production to become fully socialised. As Lenin pointed out, during the lower stage of communism the working class lays down the new rules of production in an "undemocratic" way by exercising its economic dictatorship. Although Marx wrote very little on the socialist economy he did indicate a method of social regulation and accounting according to the average social labour time. In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* he stated:

*The individual producer receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such and such an amount of labour (after deducting his labour for the common funds) and with this certificate he draws from the social stock of the means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labour. The same amount of labour which he has given society in one form, he receives back in another*

Every member of society who performs socially necessary work gets a labour voucher which can be used to withdraw goods from the public store of a corresponding quantity. An amount is deducted for the fund for education, health care, care of the elderly and administration, replacement of machinery, etc. Those who are able but refuse to contribute will be excluded. Labour vouchers are not money; they cannot be accumulated or used to hire other labour. It is quite likely that other forms of distribution could also take place immediately including a system of rationing (for goods like fuel) and free distribution where possible (including the abolition of rents).

In the *State and Revolution* Lenin pointed out that in the lower stage of communism inequality will continue to exist, since labour time vouchers cannot take into account the different needs and circumstances of individuals. Only in the higher stage of communism can freedom really exist, since only then will humanity be free from both the state, and class antagonisms. It is at this stage that the rule "from each according to his ability to each according to his needs" will become possible. Society will then be able to produce and distribute for the needs of humanity rather than for the profit of a small number of individuals. By this time the law of value will have been destroyed along with the commodity, money, and the exploitation of labour. The artificial sectioning of the globe into nation states will have been redressed and production and distribution will take place on a global basis. The needs of imperialism will no longer be the dictatorial force over society and mankind will be able to plan its own society in a rational manner. The alienation of working people from the product of their own labour and from society as a whole will have disappeared and those distinctions which stifle life today (such as that between manual and physical labour or between urban pollution and rural poverty) will have disappeared. The productive forces will then be able to develop to an extent hitherto unknown and the era of truly human history can begin.

RT

#### Notes

1. In which we include all those (Stalinists, Maoists, Trotskyists and Social Democrats) who believe that state capitalism is somehow an advance for the working class rather than a product of a decaying social system attempting to head off the worst consequences of its own contradictions.

2. For our views on this see *Class Consciousness in the Marxist Perspective*. This text was originally published in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 21 (Second series). It is now out of print but will be edited and republished in R<sup>24</sup>.

3. See *Internationalist Communist Review* 12 and 13. (£3, plus postage, from the CWO address).



# Is the Communist Manifesto Still Relevant Today?

**P**ublished almost 150 years ago the Communist Manifesto remains one of the seminal documents of marxist literature. In this article we look at the importance of the Manifesto both as a historical document and in terms of its significance for today

The Communist Manifesto was published in January 1848 on the eve of the bourgeois revolutions which swept continental Europe. The Manifesto was commissioned by the Communist League, an organisation comprising mainly of exiled German workers which was formed in London in June 1847. At its second congress in November 1847 Marx and Engels won the League over to scientific socialism, i.e. socialism based upon a historical and materialist understanding of society rather than utopian dreams. Although attributed to Marx and Engels the Manifesto was drafted solely by Marx although he borrowed heavily from earlier texts by Engels.

## The Materialist Conception of History

The Communist Manifesto is significant from a historical perspective in that it was the first exposition of marxist method to appear in the form of agitational propaganda. This does not mean that the ideas contained in the Manifesto had been conceptualised overnight, rather that they represented a synthesis of empirical observations and theoretical developments by Marx and Engels in the preceding years.

In common with the prevailing trend in German intellectual life in the 1830s and 40s Marx was initially concerned with philosophical enquiry. Hegelian philosophy was predominant and was initially admired by Marx. In contradistinction to previous philosophical system which sought to discover fixed and eternal truths, Hegelianism was progressive in that it admitted the possibility and necessity of change. Yet Hegel's philosophy was an idealist one in which human development occurred as a consequence of the dialectical development of ideas as expressed in culture and religion. For Hegel the outcome of the conflict of ideas determined the nature of society. Marx's radical break with Hegel inverted the Hegelian dialectic asserting that the material conditions of humanity determined the nature of human society and ideas. Expressing

this succinctly in *The German Ideology* (1847), Marx and Engels stated:

*In direct contrast to German philosophy, which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, actual men, and on the basis of their real life process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process  
... life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life.*

The materialist conception of history as discovered by Marx and Engels conceptualises the dynamic development of human society. As material needs are satisfied through the development of the productive process, so consciousness develops as a reflection of the changes in material circumstances.

This theoretical perspective was arrived through an analysis of the development of human society from ancient times onwards and through empirical observation of contemporary capitalist society. As a young journalist with the radical bourgeois paper *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx saw in practice the links between bourgeois property relations and the poverty of workers in articles such as *The Poverty of the Moselle Wine Growers*. In 1845 Engels had published his *Conditions of the Working Class in England*, an in depth analysis of the miserable social condition of the English proletariat and the nature of factory production. As living confirmation of the materialist conception itself these empirical observations conditioned the theoretical works leading Marx and Engels to conclude that the class struggle itself is a key determinant to the development of human history.

## The Text of The Manifesto

The first section entitled "Bourgeois and Proletarians" opens with one of the fundamental theses of the materialist method by stating

*The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles.*



Marx then goes on to illustrate this hypothesis by historical example, the struggle between free-man and slave, patrician and plebian in ancient society, lord and serf, guild-master and journeymen in the feudal period, and in the modern bourgeois epoch:

*Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other—Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.*

It is the class struggle which drives history forwards leading to "either a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes"

Marx then charts the rise of capitalism out feudal society, how the advances in world trade and new machinery created the financial and technological base for modern industry. He shows the interests of the bourgeois class coming into conflict with the restrictions of the feudal mode of production and the revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie in destroying the old order and finally acceding to state power. In what is almost an aside in the text Marx penetrates the essence of the class nature of the state which is still valid today:

*The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.*

Despite the exploitation and misery caused by the advancement of capitalism, it is seen as historically progressive both economically and politically, forging bourgeois nation states out of feudal enclaves, rapidly advancing the productive forces and creating a global economy

*The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations put together.*

Yet notwithstanding these wonders capitalism is a system riddled with contradictions. There are periodic crises of overproduction which can only be overcome by a massive destruction of the productive forces. Even though capitalism was still in its adolescence Marx observed that "The conditions of bourgeois society are too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them." It should be remembered that the Manifesto was published almost twenty years before the first volume of Capital and that whilst noting the phenomenon of crisis Marx had not yet developed a sophisticated economic analysis of its causes.

Whilst the advent of crises reveals the fundamental economic flaw in the capitalist system, capital also creates its physical antithesis, a growing class of proletarians who will bring about the revolutionary overthrow of the system.

### **The Revolutionary Class**

It is remarkable that much of Marx's analysis of the nature of the proletariat still holds true today. The Manifesto is an excellent antidote to bourgeois and even some supposedly socialist theorists, who claim that the working class has disappeared. Marx begins by looking at the economic nature of labour and how labour is itself a commodity just like any other to be bought and sold on the market. The proletarians are a class "who live so long as they can find work, and who find work so long as their labour increases capital". The division of labour in the factory coupled with technological advancement results in a de-skilling of labour and a consequent reduction in its price. The bourgeoisie can then reduce its labour costs still further through the employment of women and children.

In addition to economic exploitation Marx describes how the modern proletarian can derive no satisfaction from his work. The worker is merely an "appendage of the machine" carrying out the most simple and monotonous tasks and can have no interest in the product of his labour. The nature of factory production reflects a military hierarchy in which the worker is a "private" of the industrial army, enslaved by the machine, the bosses and their foremen. Marx also shows how in capitalist society the workers are ripped off twice over, both as producers and consumers:

*No sooner is the exploitation of the labourer by the manufacturer, so far, at an end, than he receives his wages in cash, than he is set upon by the other portions of the bourgeoisie, the landlord, the shopkeeper, the pawnbroker, etc*

As capitalism develops so the proletariat becomes enlarged, the lower middle classes with their diminutive capital cannot hope to compete with large scale production and so these strata sink into the proletariat. Furthermore there is a proletarianization even of the professional classes.

*The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked upon with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers*

If this was true in Marx's day, it is even more relevant today and serves to indicate that the



working class is not just comprised of factory and manual workers. Whilst professionals may prefer to think of themselves as "middle class" (which is itself a sociological rather than an economic definition of class) most of them are objectively proletarian.

In the course of its formation the proletariat clubs together in to form trades unions in order to defend and advance its interests in the face of capital. Marx saw the importance of the unions in forging the basis of class consciousness. Of course this is not a perspective which still holds today as the unions now form a barrier to the development of class consciousness.



*"The Spectre of Communism"  
Barricades in Paris in 1848*

Marx then asserts the revolutionary nature of the proletariat. Unlike previous exploited classes in history who came to power only to exploit other classes, the proletariat is capable of abolishing exploitation as beneath the proletariat there are no other classes left to exploit.

*The proletarians cannot become masters of the productive forces of society, except by abolishing their own previous mode of appropriation, and thereby also every other previous mode of appropriation. They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify; their mission is to destroy all previous securities for, and insurances of, individual property.*

This is a crucial concept which distinguishes the scientific socialism of Marx and Engels from previous socialist thought. Whilst the idea of communism had existed for centuries it has always been based upon the utopian principal of an act of will by well intentioned people. For the first time Marx and Engels can say that communism is an objective historic possibility by virtue of the creation of the modern proletariat embodying the negation of capital.

### **The Communist Programme**

The second section of the Manifesto entitled

"Proletarians and Communists" sets out to defend communist principals against bourgeois criticism. The section begins with an outline of the role of communists in relation to the class as a whole and to other working class parties. The communists are distinguished from other working class parties by drawing out the international nature of the class struggle and by always representing the interests of the movement as a whole. At the same time "the communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties". This is not a formulation which would be valid today but in 1848 capitalism was still a historically progressive system. It was possible for reformists and revolutionaries to fraternally

co-exist within the workers movement. At this time revolutionaries would also put forward reformist and democratic demands because these demands were actually obtainable and because communism was not immediately on the agenda. As Marx says, it was still necessary to promote as an immediate aim, the "formation of the proletariat as a class", a historic process of which reformism was a part. This situation prevailed until the outbreak of the first imperialist war in 1914 when the reformist parties passed wholly into the camp of the bourgeoisie by supporting

the war effort in all countries. Since then it has not been possible for reformism to subsist within a genuinely proletarian movement

However other formulations on the role of communists still hold true. Marx points out that the ideas and principals of communism are not flights of fancy conceived of by intellectuals but are derived from the historic process of the class struggle. The Manifesto stresses that the ultimate aim of the communists is communism, ie the abolition of bourgeois property relations.

Marx goes on to defend communist aims against common bourgeois criticisms. In defence of the abolition of bourgeois property, Marx replies that for the majority of the population private property is already done away with. For the workers have no property and the property of the petty bourgeois artisans and peasants is in the process of being destroyed. Marx is clear to distinguish bourgeois property, i.e. capital which is utilised for exploitative purposes, from goods for personal consumption. The aim of communism is to allow all producers to share equitably in what society produces

*Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation*



The *Manifesto* then deals with the transformation of culture in a communist society and berates the bourgeois intellectual for seeing cultural values as eternal and static rather than a manifestation of the present mode of production.

*Your very ideas are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property, just as your jurisprudence is but the will of your class made into law for all.*

The communists do not apologise for wanting to do away with the bourgeois family: "Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children by their parents? To this crime we plead guilty" For the working class there is no meaningful family life anyway and the much vaunted bourgeois family is riddled with hypocrisy, prostitution and adultery lurking behind the myth of patriarchal domestic bliss. The abolition of the bourgeois nation state is defended as "The working men have no country" In a global economy there is no reason for the existence of the nation state if production were planned in a rational manner. Marx gives short shrift to religious and philosophical objections to communism on the grounds that their proponents are locked within a world view of the existing order:

*What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed? The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.*

As the communist revolution will be the most radical rupture with traditional property relations it is no wonder that this requires the most radical rupture with traditional ideas.

Tacked on to the end of this section, the *Manifesto* states that the first step on the road to communism is to win the battle for democracy and a ten point program including nationalisation, graduated income tax, abolition of property in land and free education is set out. This was not meant to be a universal program for all countries at all times. It is specific to the mid nineteenth century when the first historically progressive task was the completion of the bourgeois revolution. Those leftists who today use this section of the *Manifesto* to justify support for reformism and democracy, whether in the advanced countries or the "third world" show that whilst they are quoting Marx they are not marxist. Unlike Christians who claim that a quote from the bible proves the truth of the quote, for real marxists quoting Marx only proves what Marx said and not the truth of the quote unless it can be substantiated by reference

to living reality.

## Other types of Socialism

The idea of socialism existed long before Marx. The third section of the *Manifesto* entitled "Socialist and Communist Literature" looks at different concepts of socialism which were prevalent in Marx's day. The first category defined by Marx is "Reactionary Socialism" which harked back to the paternalist certainties of feudal society. Reactionary Socialism was a manifestation of petty bourgeois resistance to the progress of capital and is reactionary as it looks back in an attempt to restore what has become historically redundant. What Marx terms "Conservative or Bourgeois Socialism" has more significant resonances for today. This the so called socialism of bourgeois philanthropists and reformers "who want all the advantages of modern social conditions without the struggles and dangers necessarily resulting therefrom" Bourgeois socialists claim that they are making reforms for the benefit of the working class whereas in reality they are for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. The third type of socialism defined by Marx is "Critical-Utopian Socialism", the "socialism of St. Simon, Fourier and Owen". This type of socialism stemmed from the dawn of the industrial age when the nascent working class was too small to be capable of acting as an independent class. Utopian socialists claims to be above class antagonisms and eschews political and revolutionary activity, relying on the moralistic view that society would be better if only everyone adopted socialist principles. The irrelevance of this type of socialism is demonstrated by the fact that the Owenites in England opposed Chartism which was arguably the largest independent working class movement in English history.

## Completion of the Bourgeois Revolution

The final section of the *Manifesto* deals with the relationship between the communists and the radical bourgeois parties. This section must be viewed in its historical context as a tactic for pushing forward the completion of the bourgeois revolution. Marx had high hopes for the imminent bourgeois revolution in Germany where the capitalist mode of production and the proletariat was far more advanced than had ever been the case in the previous English and French revolutions. It was therefore appropriate to support the bourgeois parties so far as they were against feudal reaction. Such support would be entirely contingent and the communists would retain their independence so that the proletarian movement could still struggle against the bourgeoisie. This section was formulated for the specific circumstances of the time and illustrates



the historical method of marxism. However as the bourgeois revolution has been completed worldwide there can no longer be any historic justification for such alliances today as there are no longer any progressive sections of the bourgeoisie.

### **The Manifesto as Document for Today**

The Communist Manifesto is still inspirational as a succinct explanation of the marxist method and moreover as an argument for the necessity (but not inevitability) of communism. The twentieth century experience of imperialist war and prolonged economic crisis has confirmed capitalism's historical limitations and that a revolutionary transformation of society is now more necessary and objectively possible than it was in Marx's day. Contemporary circumstances demand different tactics to those prescribed in the Manifesto which in this regard was clearly and of necessity a product of its times. This was recognised by Marx and Engels who wrote in the preface to the German edition of 1872 that whilst there had been many changes in the preceding twenty five years the general principals set out in the Manifesto are "on the whole correct." However they continue:

*The practical application of the principals will depend, as the Manifesto itself states, everywhere and at all times on the historical*

*conditions for the time being existing and, for that reason no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of section II (the ten point reform program referred to above).*

Writing in 1872 Marx and Engels witnessed the experience of the Paris Commune. This proved that the working class could not "simply lay hold of the ready made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes", as the Manifesto had implied. In new circumstances Marx and Engels understood that it was necessary for the proletariat to destroy the bourgeois state. Other historical developments have also had major consequences for the political activities of revolutionaries. The essence of the marxist method as set out in the Manifesto is to grasp the implications of change for revolutionary theory and practice. Whilst our contemporary perspectives for struggle could not have been envisaged in the Manifesto its concluding lines are as pertinent now as they were one hundred and fifty years ago

*Let the ruling class tremble at the Communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.*

**WORKERS OF ALL COUNTRIES UNITE!**  
PBD

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# The General Strike 1926

Seventy years ago, in May 1926, the only general strike in the history of the British working class movement took place. Optimistically thought of as a revolutionary situation, the strike ended after only nine days, in complete demoralisation and defeat.

To understand the limitations of the strike it is useful to outline the historical period in which it took place, and the events leading up to it. The example set by the Russian Revolution in 1917, and the overthrow of the Kaiser and the forming of workers' councils in Germany, had echoes in other European countries. In 1919 in Britain the possibility of revolution appeared imminent in Belfast and on Clydeside where 'a Bolshevik rising' was feared. However, as the 1920s wore on, the waves of proletarian struggle in Europe were defeated and the possibility of revolution was crushed. ...

Was revolution on the agenda in Britain in 1926, or was it, as the Bolshevik Karl Radek commented at the time to the Conservative MP (later Lord) Boothby,

*... make no mistake, this is not a revolutionary movement. It is simply a wage dispute?*

## Events leading up to the Strike

In an objective economic sense the crisis of the 1920s was undoubtedly revolutionary. During the First World War Britain had lost many of its traditional markets. Its mining industry was the biggest in Europe, employing one and half million workers. The only solution to its problems within capitalism was a draconian cut in wages.

In April 1921 after the mine owners announced wage reductions and posted lock out notices at the pit heads, the leaders of the Triple Alliance (Miners, Railwaymen and Transport workers unions) called for a transport strike. The strike was called off at the last minute and the miners were forced to resume work on the owners' terms (Frank Hodges, the miners' leader, was later appointed a member of the National Electricity Board by a Conservative Government). This marked the end of the 'Cripple Alliance' and the day became known as 'Black Friday'

Thus led to a considerable growth in the tiny British Communist Party which was mainly based in the coalfields of Wales and Scotland.

In 1924 the mine owners agreed to a wage increase but the economic crisis of 1925 led to a depression in the mining industry. The owners responded by demanding a return to the 1921 wage structure which meant an increase in working hours and a wage cut. The miners' case was put to the General Council of the TUC which, with the support of the Transport and Railway unions, placed an embargo on the movement of coal from July 31st, the day when the employers' notices terminated. With such a show of strength, it appeared that the miners were capable of resistance. The government's response to this was to award a temporary subsidy until May 1st 1926. This would maintain the miners wages at present levels and set up a Royal Commission to examine the possible restructuring of the industry. This climb down by the government was regarded by the unions as a great victory and was named 'Red Friday'. It, in effect, bought nine months peace and gave time for the state to organise a resistance movement for the struggles ahead. Its first move was to create The Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies and form committees to organise those citizens prepared to maintain supplies and services in the event of a general strike. Considerable stocks of coal, food and fuel were also built up. Preparations were thorough and by the spring the government was ready for anything. Meanwhile the unions, relieved to have avoided confrontation, sat back and awaited the report of the Royal Commission. The Communist Party warned the workers what was happening

*the Government, acting upon behalf of the capitalist class, is certain to prepare for a new struggle with the working class under more favourable circumstances.*

*The Workers Weekly August 7 1925*

The same paper also warned that

*The Royal Commission is once again, as always, only the smokescreen for the preparation for a decisive battle*

It should have come as no surprise then that the



Royal Commission recommended a temporary reduction in wages or an increase in hours to make the industry profitable. The miners, as the Government had long known, refused to accept the report and the battle was on.

### The Strike and the Role of the Unions

The unions were forced into a situation which they had been keen to avoid and the prospect for them of losing control of events was frightening. They wanted to organise an effective economic strike but were terrified that the leadership of it would fall into the hands of revolutionary elements. An editorial in *Workers' Weekly* (CPGB journal) had, as we have seen, warned against any euphoria over 'Red Friday' and stated that workers should understand that "the struggle for wages involves the struggle for power." (loc. cit. Aug. 7th 1925).

The 'workers' leaders', however, were keen to point out that the strike was purely economic and in no way a challenge to the state:

*I have never disguised that in a challenge to the constitution God help us unless the Government won - but this is not only not a revolution, it is not something that says: we want to overthrow everything. It is merely a plain, economic, industrial dispute.*

J. Thomas, Rail Union Leader, (quoted from Farman, *The General Strike* p. 112)

It is quite clear that Thomas (a future Labour Minister) and others in the Labour movement still supported the capitalist state as they had done a dozen years before at the outbreak of the imperialist war in 1914.

But the era of 'plain, economic industrial disputes' was over. The First World War confirmed that capitalism had entered a new era. The war, a product of competition between the capitalist states, showed that capitalism could only expand by the intermittent physical destruction of capital and the working class. The war was only brought to an end through the actions of the international working class who thus demonstrated that they were easily capable of founding a higher form of civilisation. This was what caused the ruling class to tremble all over Europe. In supporting the war in defence of their own national capital the unions showed, on the other hand, that they were organs against the workers and for the preservation of capitalism. It is a position they have never wavered from since.

Whilst the government was organising scab labour in preparation for the strike the unions did nothing to prepare the working class, either organisationally or politically. Instead the TUC hailed 'Red Friday' as a great victory and trusted

the future to the Royal Commission

The organisation of the strike was security in the hands of the unions organised nationally by the newly formed General Council of the TUC and, at a local level, by trades councils.

The fear that control of the strike might slip from the unions' grasp meant that they were determined not to allow any independent action from the working class. In reality it was never a 'general' strike, indeed the leaders preferred not to use the term, as the trade union membership was never called out all at once. A two tier system was employed which meant that many industries were held back as a 'reserve army' to be used in the second week. This holding back of large sectors gave the government time to organise its relief force. Just as the action was beginning to take effect and as the reserves joined the strike it was called off and an unconditional surrender was made to the government. Thousands of workers had risked their jobs and starvation to no avail.

### The Response of the Class

Although the ending of the strike was a demoralising defeat for the class many positive actions were evident during it and afterwards. There was a tremendous show of solidarity from workers in the industrial centres and one of the problems the unions faced was of holding back the 'reserves'. In some places "soviets" were proclaimed. Despite reports of fraternisation between police and strikers, and the celebrated football match in Plymouth, there are many instances of violence. Pitched battles were fought in Leeds, Cardiff and Ipswich, and there are many other examples of militancy. *The Times* newspaper premises were bombed but this represented far too much an example of independent class action that it frightened the leaders. Calling off the strike before "things got out of hand" must have been a great relief. Here is Thomas speaking again on May 13th in the House of Commons.

*What I dreaded about this strike more than anything else was this - if by any chance it should have got out of the hands of those who would be able to exercise some control, every sane man knows what would have happened.*

The day after the strike was called off some workers believed that it was because they had won. In some towns victory celebrations were held. Once the true outcome was realised there was a great outburst of anger from the class. The claims that the strike was weakening by the *British Gazette* (Government newsheet) and the pathetic acceptance of this by the union leaders was not reflected in reality. The day after the



strike ended there were 100,000 more workers out than on the day it began! One observer in Manchester wrote,

*It looked as though the end of the strike might be the beginning of revolution.*

(Farman, p. 240)

Some workers organised rent strikes and the miners in many areas stayed out throughout the summer (one of the hottest on record) eventually losing everything for which they had fought. They had achieved nothing.

## The Role of the State

*The attempt to set up soviets in a few places during the General Strike represented only the wishful thinking of a few workers*

The ferocity with which the state will react against the working class in order to defend itself is not confined to so-called totalitarian regimes. The British democratic bourgeoisie is

wouldn't take too much encouragement to turn their weapons on the bourgeoisie

Thus all sounds rather familiar to us today. Before the miners strike of 1984/85 the government was also well prepared. The Ridley Plan (first announced in May 1978 in *The Economist*) suggested to the Tory Party leaders that the building up of coal supplies at the power stations, recruitment of non-union lorry drivers and a large mobile police squad was the way to go towards defeating those sectors of the working class that posed a future threat. They had seen the strength of the class during the 1972 strike when 'flying pickets' were used with overwhelming success to stop the movement of supplies. (For more on the Miners Strike of 1984-5 see *Revolutionary Perspectives* 22 (Second Series))

## Was Revolution on the Agenda?

Reactionary though they were, to blame the unions solely for the defeat of the strike is to oversimplify the matter. Given the international situation in 1926 there was little hope of the extension of any revolutionary movement and in any case the Labour movement which exerted a strong hold over the minds of the working class certainly had no revolutionary agenda. The General Council of the TUC also feared that a successful outcome to the strike would strengthen the hold of the Left within the unions. To their dismay Communist Party membership grew to 10,000 after the strike whilst the unions lost 2 million members!

The Communist Party of Great Britain, although working to develop its organisation through the National Minority Movement, up to and during the strike, it was a weak political force within the working class. Many of its members followed Lenin's mistaken advice to join the Labour Party (from which they were expelled in the aftermath of the General Strike). But the CPGB was also being undermined by pressure from the CPSU. Stalin's policy of 'Socialism in One Country' had substituted struggle for any remnants of the international revolution into finding ways in which the USSR could avoid foreign attack and reach agreements with the Western bourgeoisie. As the economic crisis deepened inside British capitalism Stalin was looking for peace with British imperialism through the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee set up in 1925. This was a joint venture formed to create good Anglo-Soviet relations and reduce the threat of intervention. The formation of the Committee and its backing by Moscow was to provide the so called 'left' leaders of the General Council with a certain credibility in the eyes of many. Events were to prove that it was not only the 'right' of the Council but also



no different. Long before the strike the state had prepared itself in the event of disorder. The country was to be divided into regions, each region having a regional seat of government under a regional commissioner. Army and navy leave was cancelled and special constables were recruited from the bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and "professional classes" including students, along with volunteers to help keep transport and essential services going. The effectiveness of this scab labour was limited and in some cases even counter-productive. Its chief aim, though, was as a publicity exercise which would help to demoralise the strikers. Despite the immense strength behind these reactionary forces, had the situation taken on a revolutionary potential it is quite realistic to believe that they could have been crushed by the strikers. In a real class battle troops recruited from the working class



this 'left' which played a part in the betrayal of the working class. In the second half of the twenties the Comintern (CI) was totally dominated by the Russian Party and had ceased to be a means for pursuing the strategic and tactical needs of the international working class. Any potential for revolution was undermined by CI policies to preserve the Russian state.

### Lessons of the Strike

The capitalist nature of the unions was clear to many in 1914 when, with their friends in the Labour Party, they had not opposed imperialist war and had in fact called a class truce and implemented no-strike deals in support of it. The unions have never been interested in overthrowing the capitalist system and the strike was to reveal to many workers their true character as agents of the capitalist state. At best they have only acted to get wage increases or improve working conditions in order to maintain their credibility. Their role is to negotiate the price of workers' labour power through negotiation with the bosses. This only makes sense within the framework of a national capitalist economy and so they defend this economy in both war and peace. This was quite apparent before and during the strike as the leaders were conducting behind the scenes negotiations to end it whilst appearing to be carrying out plans to intensify it.

Today as the class struggles to defend itself from the attacks of capital it is outside the straitjacket of union-led and organised activity that the way forward lies. Strikes must unite workers from different sectors and be run by recallable delegates on strike committees responsible to mass meetings of workers. In supporting the demands of workers struggling against capitalist attacks an alternative direction, away from reformist or so-called transitional programmes, must be pointed out. A TUC general strike, as in 1926, is not the answer. This is an activity carried out under a capitalist leadership for bourgeois goals. Getting the TUC to call a general strike as the Trotskyists still demand shows that they have not learned anything from history.

A general strike is not the same as a mass strike. The former is nothing more than a warning from one part of the bourgeois social order to the capitalist state. Such set pieces give the ruling class time and enough to prepare. The mass strike on the other hand arises from the struggle. It is produced by the need to unify struggles against the state and this elevates it to a higher, political, level.

*Today, at a time that the working class must educate, organise and lead itself in the course of the revolutionary struggle, when the revolu-*

*tion itself is directed not only against the established state power but also against capitalist exploitation, mass strikes appear as the natural method to mobilise the broadest proletarian layers into action, to revolutionise and organise them.*

R. Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*

This is not to say that we advocate sectional, "go it alone" struggles. The miners in 1985 illustrated that a group of workers, however militant, cannot, on their own, challenge the bourgeoisie.

All workers today are faced with the prospect of worsening conditions, job security and pay. So long as they remain bound by legal rules, imposed by the bosses and enforced by the unions they will never get anywhere, even at an economic level. There is no point therefore in continually looking to the unions for leadership. Leadership has to come from the workers themselves. However, towards the end of the Twentieth Century, as another global accumulation cycle draws to a close, the total bankruptcy of capitalism once again gives a deeper meaning to every economic struggle of the working class. For us the present system cannot deliver anything except poverty, famine and war. It has nothing to offer us except the prospect of its own destruction. Only a political party which prepares the working class to recognise that it cannot achieve anything inside this system, that roots its work in the real struggles of the class and which organises the most far-sighted and determined class fighters can prepare the way for a real confrontation with the capitalist state. In 1926, in the CPGB, the working class in Britain had only a pale imitation of a revolutionary party which had already been sucked onto reformist grounds. Seventy years later we still need to build a revolutionary weapon which expresses the organised leadership of the working class.

Bird

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# Readers' Letters

## No Iranian "Revolution"

Dear Comrades

Thanks for the first issue of *Revolutionary Perspectives*. I received it three weeks ago. I have to give congratulations to the CWO for its revolutionary efforts in this difficult historic period for the working class. I hope that *Workers Voice* or a similar paper will appear again in the near future...

...after I read RP, on the events of 1979 in Iran: the text on Islamic fundamentalism talks about "revolution in Iran" (RP No.1 p.25 and "Iranian revolution" is mentioned in WV79 p.8 too). I wonder if this is due to some editorial errors or a revolution has taken place without being acknowledged and analysed by the proletariat and its political milieu. If the latter is the case, it leads to another question about the nature of this revolution and this one will move the discussion to another level: the concept and terminology of revolution.

Internationalist greetings  
EA

Thanks for your letter. *Workers Voice* has not gone away but will be used as an agitational paper on an ad hoc basis as the class struggle demands. We will still be producing RP and *Internationalist Communist Review* on a regular basis as well as more pamphlets. Thanks also for pointing out the ambiguity in the sentence in question on Iran. No, we have not discovered a new revolution in Iran in 1979. For us a change of regime is not a revolution. A revolution implies the overthrow of one class' domination and the beginning of a new mode of production. Iran was capitalist before 1979 and remained capitalist after it. A careful reading of the text shows that it says that the Khomeini regime was initially installed with the

support of US imperialism and that should have given the clue to our real position. When we put a word in quotations it means that we don't accept this word even if it is widely used (e.g. describing Trotskyists and Stalinists as "socialists"). Anyway thanks for giving us the opportunity to clear that one up.

Editor

## Drugs: Capitalism Needs More than a Fix

Dear CWO

Your recent series on drugs was superb --- a far sharper analysis than the usual "quasi-libertarian" approach. You may find it interesting to know that here in the States drug legalisation/reform is almost completely dominated by far-right wing, laissez-faire types influenced by Milton Friedman, who want to bring the "benefits" of the free market into play.

Although I would personally describe myself as closer to Dutch/German council communism than the Italian Left, I have always found your publications a serious read and look forward to your new format.

CP

This is just one of many letters on the series of three articles on drugs which appeared in *Workers Voice* 76-8. We intend to update this and issue it as a pamphlet next year but anyone wishing to read the originals can obtain them from the group address for £2 (UK/Eire) or £3 elsewhere.

Editor

## Kazakhstan strikes

In the southern Kazakhstan town of Kentsu, 25 workers in a ferrous metals enterprise have gone on hunger strike over wages that have not been paid for a record 15 months. As of February 22, they were already marking the sixth day of their sit-down strike. Foreign creditors, who have taken on the financial obligations of

the plant, have reportedly issued a paltry sum of \$8000 to appease the strikers and have promised to provide another \$23,000 to cover the unpaid wages.

In the south-eastern mining town of Tekeli miners have finally received their salaries for September and October of last year. The Kazakhstan government was compelled to issue targeted credits in the amount of \$2.3 millions for the lead and zinc combine in Tekeli under pressure of the free trade union of miners.

Finally, in the north-eastern city of Ust-Kamenogorsk, miners continue their underground strike which began last week. Despite a ploy by directors of the state mining company to buy off the workers by issuing 2000 tenges per employee (a mere \$30) workers refused to even show up at the cashiers. Offended by the offer, miners protested that each and every miner is in debt from 5 - 10,000 tenges due to unpaid wages.

Translated from the Kazakh newspaper, *Caravan*  
CV

These strikes were taking place at the same time as those in the Ukraine and Siberia. With the situation of the working class in the former Soviet Union becoming increasingly desperate we will be devoting an article to it in the next issue of RP.

Editor

## To our Readers

Thanks to all those who have written over the last few weeks and apologies if we have not included your letter in this issue. We have always maintained that a dialogue with readers is essential for the development of revolutionary theory and we will be expanding our readers' pages in future issues.

In the meantime this publication takes a large number of our resources to produce and we ask readers to support us financially. Why not take out a supporters' sub? Rates are to be found on the inside front cover.



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